

A Qualitative Analysis of the Curriculum for Career-Ready Graduates from the Perspective of Academics and Business Professionals: China, Europe and the United States

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This study seeks to identify alignments and disparities in the expectations of professionals and academicians in different countries and continents of the career-ready college graduate. A survey of professionals and academicians in China, Europe and the United States identified preferred teaching methods and areas of instruction. This study analyzes how those preferred teaching methods and areas of instruction line up with a series of hypotheses regarding a pedagogical approach designed to ensure learning outcomes produce the career-ready graduate desired for today's global economy.

INTRODUCTION

For well over the past two decades, educators in areas including international business, marketing and public relations (PR) studies, have been immersed in assessing approaches to curriculum development to ensure career-ready graduates are prepared to succeed in the global economy.

In one study of executives working for Canadian firms, researchers learned that North American business executives found academe “too remote, too academic and not consumer-oriented enough in their approaches” (Beamish, 1989). The findings urged academe to make needed improvements to better equip graduates with business studies and business skills. Communication skills were ranked by respondents as the most important of the 12 skills that business schools teach to international business students.

Almost 25 years since the Beamish study identified the value business leaders place on communication skills, the authors now pose three hypotheses: 1) writing skills are the most highly valued communication skills within the framework of communications studies; 2) ethics are ranked as the least valuable of the behaviors taught within the communications curriculum; and, 3) there is little agreement among professionals and academics worldwide on the educational requirements (e.g., behaviors, teaching topics, materials, etc.) for career success.

The authors assert that these factors illustrate the difficulty that continues to plague undergraduate educators seeking to prepare a student for success in a global economy. Unanswered questions include: What are the implications of this struggle for the undergraduate students with high expectations of the global transferability of their undergraduate studies and the reality of the education delivered? Is a refreshed approach to pedagogy and curriculum mapping one pathway to address this disconnect?

Educators also must grapple with how much to rely on professional input to help map the undergraduate curriculum. Is the “product” educators produce – “the career-ready student” – the right focus? What do we trade off by giving the business world what it wants in our curriculum versus the behaviors and skills that we as educators believe are important? And is there a difference?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The question of how to teach students in international programs has been examined in the literature. Manton, et al (2008) reinforce it is the responsibility of academics to teach the skills and competencies necessary for graduates to succeed in the global environment. Two major trends in mobility have profoundly shaped international curriculum development: program and institution mobility (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Hatakenaka, 2004) and the mobility of academics traveling frequently to work on educational programs (Clarke & Flaherty, 2002). Educators thus gain first-hand observations of, and frequently differences in, pedagogy around the world. But whether such knowledge is being reflected in the curricula is another question. Doh (2010) called outright for a curriculum that was more international in scope, decrying the lack of global vision in U.S. institutions as “shockingly national – even regional” (p. 165).

Pedagogical Influencers

Based on Beamish (1989) and his early study, Forray and Goodnight (2002) attempted to define what to teach in an era of increasing globalization. In their research, they got even closer to stakeholder expectations in a survey of alumni and recruiters on awareness of and attitude toward the curriculum in international business programs. Kao and Mao (2011) believe academe should be led by the needs of the business environment, and validated a conceptual framework for aligning education with changes in global markets. Finch and Crunkilton (1999) suggest that curricula must simultaneously be justified by the profession, yet remain pedagogically focused.

Zapalska and Ilacqua (2007) argued that academe needs to adopt new pedagogical techniques to teach students to respond critically to the challenges of doing business with foreign cultures. In groundbreaking studies, Limaye (2000) addressed the importance of a pedagogy that forces students across countries and cultures to face their perceptual variations. He maintains the resulting cognitive dissonance is a valuable teaching and learning tool.

Learning Styles

The differences in teaching and learning styles in the U.S. and China, for instance, reinforce that students of those respective cultures learn differently (Nevett, Nimran & Viboonsanti, 1993; Smith & Fu, 1994; Waller, 1993; Zhang, 1999). One study asserts that the methods of instruction used in home universities can equally be used in host countries (e.g., Kaynak, Yucelt & Barker, 1990) whereas others argue that business educators must adapt their teaching activities for overseas students (Clarke & Flaherty, 2002). Finally, Mahrous and Ahmed (2010) found even students themselves have differing opinions on the efficacy of various teaching tools on their learning outcomes.

Yet for the many differences that exist, there are also similarities as identified through a three-country comparison of Canada, New Zealand and the U.S., where students agreed that regular lectures, case methods, decision-making exercises, and group discussions are universally preferred (Kaynak, Yucelt & Barker, 1990).

Writing Skills

In the U.S., few academics would argue with the notion that teaching writing skills is a critical element of student preparation for professional employment. The National Commission on Writing (College Board, 2004) calls writing a threshold skill for both employment and promotion. Public relations professionals agree. In its seminal report, the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA, 1999) maintains public relations’ writing is an essential, discrete skill. Noted public relations educator Van

Slyke (2006) calls the student's ability to write a news release reflecting professional expectations "the ticket to the dance." Allen and Knight (2009) found collaboration between professionals and educators an effective, reliable means of identifying career-specific skills.

Question of Ethics

Less precise and more difficult to define, teach, and, for students, to learn is ethical interpretations, especially in cultures with varying definitions of what constitutes ethical behavior and appropriateness of communication. In the U.S., it is generally acknowledged that incorporating ethics into the curricula and pedagogical approaches is not only appropriate (Carveth, Ferraris & Backus, 2006; Rogers, Kochunny & Ogbuehi, 1993), it is also critical in teaching students to survive in the global business world (Kreitner & Reif, 1980). While some question the ability to actually teach ethics (Rothenburg, 2003), Kienzler (2004) notes only the challenges of teaching ethical decision making. Schaupp, Ponzurick & Schaupp (1992) argue for a case method for teaching ethics.

Au, Chan and Tse (2006) cite the recent upsurge in corruption in China as a rationale for studies on business ethics education in their country. Even so, finding common ground for the discussion of the pedagogy of ethics and ethical behavior is difficult because of the vast chasm between Eastern and Western notions (Schulman, 2006). The authors found little research and virtually no published studies in the literature comparing the U.S. and China in the importance attached to the pedagogy of ethics in the curricula of communication skills as an extension of ethical behavior. The authors intend to at least nibble around the edges of this thorny question.

HYPOTHESIS

This study and the series of hypotheses posed within rest firmly upon the foundation established by Beamish and extended by Forray and Goodnight. In this study, the authors identify the value that business leaders place on communications skills when assessing undergraduates during the hiring process.

The authors postulate that, even more narrowly than Beamish's broadly identified "communication skills", 1) writing skills are the most highly valued of the communication skills taught within the framework of communications studies; 2) ethics will be ranked as the least valuable of the behaviors taught within the communications curriculum; and 3) there is little agreement among professionals and academics worldwide on the educational requirements (e.g., behaviors, teaching topics, materials, etc.) for career success.

We make this series of hypotheses based both on the literature and on our experience as educators at Columbia College Chicago, educators committed to ensuring that our curriculum is driving toward a mission of "career-readiness in an increasingly global economy". We began the process of moving toward career readiness as a goal two years ago, when we began to transform the pedagogy in PR education. We determined "career-readiness" was an appropriate outcome to strive for based on a number of factors, including: 1) our college's focus on ensuring career-readiness through its sponsorship of industry-prep events for graduating seniors, which *requires* our students to present a body of work constructed throughout their education representing content produced through in-classroom and internship experiences; 2) our own Marketing Communication department's emphasis on career-readiness vis a vis required coursework with a marketing-yourself curriculum and a departmental brand emphasis on having a faculty of teaching professionals dedicated to helping students get started in their career; 3) national data confirming that four in ten 5th through 12th grade parents say that getting a good job is the reason why their child will get an education beyond high school (Inside Higher Ed, 2012); and 4) anecdotal information from our students that helping them get started in their career is a primary motivator for academic engagement (Internal Assessment Studies, 2010 through 2012).

The global aspect of our mission is a direct result not only of the globalization occurring within the U.S. economy, but also the College's emphasis on globalization. Let us summarize three quick examples. First, as Columbia College students study in Prague, England, Italy and a host of other countries, they receive lectures and network with not only the faculty members traveling with them from the U.S., but

with the Europe-based professionals and academics who lecture, structure and even evaluate their assignments while overseas. Many of our students leave determined to return. Have we prepared them to succeed in the eyes of our peers and colleagues abroad, many of whom are hiring managers and job applicant evaluators? Second, there is an increasing number of faculty from across the college teaching and collaborating in the People’s Republic of China (PRC), including one author of this paper who spent part of the fall 2012 semester as a visiting lecturer at Tongji University in Shanghai. Our college has aggressive student exchange program with Tongji University for their students to study at Columbia. Can we say with confidence that what they learn and how they learn will apply at home? Third, many of our graduates go on to work for global agencies and global companies, and aspire to transfer overseas. Are they ready?

The need has never been greater to ensure we can deliver on our promise to prepare these students for the rich, global careers they are increasingly determined to seek. At the same time, it warrants ongoing debate within the academic community on the benefits and pitfalls of career-readiness as a desired outcome of education.

METHODOLOGY

Informed in part by Diamond’s (1989) writing, we began our four-step process by renewing the curriculum map for the Marketing Communication department.

Step One: Behaviors

The first step involved bringing together a cross-section of full-time faculty members to brainstorm the desired learning outcomes for our graduates, first, in terms of behaviors of the career-ready graduate best prepared for career success. Based on our close partnerships with industry, and the fact that many members of both full-time faculty and the adjunct corps continue as working professionals albeit in a limited capacity (e.g., on boards of or as advisors to area non-profits), we were able to draw on recent input and insights to develop a list of four behaviors we felt confident captured industry desires as well as our own aspirations for our students.

**TABLE 1
BEHAVIORS**

<i>Behavior</i>	Insight Seeker	Content Creator/Storyteller	Collaborator	Ethical Leader
<i>Defined by...</i>	Exhibit curiosity, critical thinking, analytic approaches that reflect multicultural literacy	Create effective, strategic and unique communication solutions	Display the interpersonal and teamwork skills required to co-collaborate on projects and engage audiences	Form and draw from empathetic values and demonstrate accountability

Step Two: Skills

Our second step was to have the team of full-time faculty translate each behavior into relevant skills that could be applied to our curriculum and subsequently measured. We came up with a list of 20 skills total.

**TABLE 2
SKILLS**

Behaviors List	Skills List
1. <u>Insight Seeker</u> : Exhibit curiosity, critical thinking, analytic approaches that reflect multicultural literacy	Employ critical thinking skills
	Employ creative thinking skills
	Employ visual thinking skills
	Employ research skills (primary and secondary)
	Identify and define multicultural perspectives
	Identify and define historical (including political and social) perspectives – methods, theories, strategies and tactics
	Identify and define major technologies (digital, social, web-based, etc.)
	Demonstrate active interest in learning about the profession
2. <u>Content Creator/Storyteller</u> : Create effective, strategic and unique communication solutions	Apply real-world understanding to content
	Apply appropriate technologies to campaigns/projects
	Craft technically and grammatically correct written materials
	Craft targeted messages
	Analyze a problem and follow and appropriate course of action
	Create thematically consistent and unique content for a multitude of platforms (verbal, visual, digital, web, social media, etc.)
3. <u>Collaborator</u> : Display the interpersonal and teamwork skills required to co-collaborate on projects and engage audiences	Work as a team member
	Demonstrate sound interpersonal skills: rapport, preparation, empathy, self-awareness, give and take
	Deliver presentations with purpose e.g., designed to educate and/or motivate an audience
4. <u>Ethical Leader</u> : Form and draw from empathetic values and demonstrate accountability	Objectively and respectfully discuss communications practices, including ethical implications
	Solve problems in a manner that demonstrates deep understanding of ethical implications
	Articulate the impact of one’s work on oneself and the greater community

Step Three: Vetting the List

As a third step, the draft list of behaviors and skills was vetted with adjunct faculty members so adjustments could be made to customize the map accordingly. While minor adjustments were made to the list of skills based on input, no changes were suggested to the list of behaviors and the findings supported the direction of our research.

Step Four: Objective Validation and Input

The fourth step was to develop an online survey targeted to professionals and academics outside of the college to gather their perspective on whether our curriculum map is:

- Developing the right behaviors
- Developing the right skills
- Utilizing the best methods of instruction

We wanted to identify the commonalities and variances in perspectives among U.S., Chinese and European professionals and academics concerning each of the above-listed points to satisfy the three questions raised in our hypotheses:

- Writing skills are the most highly valued of the communication skills taught within the framework of communications studies;
- Ethics will be ranked as the least valuable of the behaviors taught within the communications curriculum; and
- There is little agreement among professionals and academics worldwide on the educational requirements (e.g., behaviors, teaching topics, materials, etc.) for career success.

To collect the input, we administered an online, 11-question survey to professionals and academicians primarily working in the PR field of marketing communication through a variety of formal and informal channels, everything from posting a link on LinkedIn to access our professional networks to asking our contacts at the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) to forward it to members.

RESPONDENTS' PROFILE

While the link was sent to approximately 100 potential respondents, the total number of respondents at this time is 26 (n =26), which 12 from the U.S., nine from China and five from Europe. In marketing research, a 3% response rate is considered statistically significant, so 21% exceeded expectations. In addition, we determined that fewer quality responses from senior-level decision makers outweighed the benefits of a higher number of respondents at more junior levels with less overall accountability.

TABLE 3
RESPONDENTS' GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION

I work primarily in...	
China	34%(n=9)
Europe	20%(n=5)
United States	46%(n=12)
Total:	26

Results from the questionnaire were scored and developed into four profiles: one for total respondents, one for China-based respondents, one for the U.S.-based respondents and one for academics only. With only 20% (n=5) of our respondents representing Europe, we determined we didn't have enough input to draw conclusions on attitudes of Europe-based professionals and academics.

All of our survey respondents self-identified as professionals while thirteen of our respondents also self-identified as academics. The academics represented a cross-section of ranks, ranging from adjunct professor to full professor. Four of the academics reported themselves as either assistant professor or professor rank, which are full-time teaching positions in the U.S. We do not know if that is the case in Europe and China, something we hope to seek a clearer understanding of at the next stage of inquiry.

TABLE 4
RESPONDENTS' ACADEMIC RANK AND PROFESSIONAL COMPOSITION

Academic Ranking Composition:		Professional Composition:	
Instructor	31% (n=4)	Vice President	19% (n=5)
Adjunct Professor	39% (n=5)	Managing Director	27% (n=7)
Assistant Professor	15% (n=2)	Communications Officer	27% (n=7)
Professor	15% (n=2)	Agency/Group President	27% (n=7)
Total	13	Total	26

The academics are comprised of a mix of rankings, ranging from instructor to full professor. On the other hand, the professionals all hold exclusively senior-level positions within public and private corporations (81%). The junior-most professional responding to our survey held the title of vice president (15%), a position that has major new business, account and people management responsibilities. Beyond that, the remaining respondents all held the senior-most positions of managing director, communications officer or agency/group president.

In terms of industry area of focus, all of the professionals represent one of the four categories from which we were seeking input: public corporation, private corporation, public sector and non-profit/non-governmental organization (NGO), with the smallest represented groups being the public sector (8%) and NGOs (12%).

TABLE 5
REPRESENTED INDUSTRIES

Area of industry you most often represent...	
Public Corporation	54% (n=14)
Private Corporation	26% (n=7)
Public Sector	8% (n=2)
NGO	12% (n=3)
Total	26

In another testament to the experience of our respondents, most respondents (85%) have been working for more than 10 years.

TABLE 6
YEARS IN PROFESSIONAL/ACADEMIC PRACTICE

I have been an academic or PR practitioner for...	
Less than 10 years	15% (n=4)
10-20 years	47% (n=12)
20-30 years	23% (n=6)
More than 30 years	15% (n=4)
Total	26

LIMITATIONS

Our response rate is one key limitation with our study. We were disappointed in the low level of responses from Europe (n=5) despite multiple attempts to utilize our network of Europe-based peers and colleagues. We were aiming for a relatively even distribution of respondents representing China, Europe and the United States. As we achieved a relatively even response from China and the U.S., we were able to make comparisons between the two countries, which we were not able to do with Europe. We did include the responses from Europe in the overall data and are determined to renew efforts and expand our study. Also, we have an overall low response rate (n=26), which includes responses from the U.S. and China, although again this limitation must be balanced with the advantage of having data from senior-level professionals and academics, which we believe is a valuable attribute of our study.

THE DATA

We collected data in four areas of our curricular map: behaviors, skills, topics and methods of instruction. We'll examine each area and reflect on how the findings tie to our hypotheses.

Behaviors

We began our data collection by seeking input on our list of four behaviors. We asked respondents to rank each of the behaviors in one of five categories, ranging from vital/required at the high end, to unnecessary on the low end, with an opportunity for a ranking of neutral.

The behavior that received the highest ranking was "content creator/storyteller," which 100% of academics, 92% of U.S.-based respondents and 89% of China-based respondents agreed was vital/required. The second most highly ranked behavior was "insight seeker," which 81% of respondents viewed as vital/required. At a distant third was "collaborator," which 66% of total respondents agreed was vital/required, followed by "ethical leader," which 62% of total respondents agreed was vital/required.

TABLE 7
PERSPECTIVES ON BEHAVIORS LIST (TOTAL RESPONDENTS: INCLUDES
RESPONDENT BASED IN EUROPE)

Behaviors List	Country	Vital/Required	A positive but not a required behavior	Neutral	Leaning Toward Unnecessary	Unnecessary
<u>Insight Seeker</u> : Exhibit curiosity, critical thinking, analytic approaches that reflect multicultural literacy	China	66%	33%	0%	0%	0%
	U.S.	83%	17%	0%	0%	0%
	Academics	85%	15%	0%	0%	0%
	*Total Respondents	81%	19%	0%	0%	0%
<u>Content Creator/Storyteller</u> : Create effective, strategic and unique communication solutions	China	89%	11%	0%	0%	0%
	U.S.	92%	8%	0%	0%	0%
	Academics	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%
	*Total Respondents	85%	12%	0%	3%	0%
<u>Collaborator</u> : Display the interpersonal and teamwork skills required to co-collaborate on projects and engage audiences	China	67%	33%	0%	0%	0%
	U.S.	67%	33%	0%	0%	0%
	Academics	71%	30%	0%	0%	0%
	*Total Respondents	66%	34%	0%	0%	0%

Ethical Leader: Form and draw from empathetic values and demonstrate accountability	China	44%	56%	0%	0%	0%
	U.S.	75%	25%	0%	0%	0%
	Academics	62%	38%	0%	0%	0%
	*Total Respondents	62%	35%	0%	3%	0%

As one of the overall goals of this study was to use the process to validate our list of behaviors, the input here is meaningful. Only one or possibly two different Europe-based professionals ranked two of our four behaviors as “leaning toward unnecessary”. Besides that finding, all four behaviors were ranked by the remaining 95% of professionals and 100% of academics as either vital/required or a positive. None were ranked below a neutral as leaning toward unnecessary or unnecessary. This input validates that the behaviors we’re striving to develop and hone in the curriculum are on track to create the career-ready professional in the view of professionals and academics worldwide.

Universal Agreement with Importance of Content Creation/Storytelling

As mentioned previously, the behavior that received the highest ranking was “content creator/storyteller,” which 100% of academics, 92% of U.S.-based respondents and 89% of China-based respondents agreed was vital/required. This is a critical insight as the core of our communications curriculum in the last five years or more has migrated toward content creation, in line with our belief as educators in its value as well as the college-wide mandate to prepare students to leave their undergraduate experience with a body of work constructed through both in-classroom and internship experiences.

Ethics Receives Lowest Ranking

While we were not surprised by the low ranking that “ethical leader” received at 62% of total respondents, we noted a wide gap in the perspective on ethics between China and the U.S. Only 44% of professionals and academics in China ranked “ethical leaders” as vital/required behavior, while 75% of the U.S.-based professionals and academics ranked it as vital/required. It should be noted that the remaining academics and professionals in both countries ranked “ethical leader” as a positive but not a required behavior, and none saw it as neutral, leaning toward unnecessary or unnecessary. This finding calls into question how ethics should be taught on a global scale and what it means to be considered vital/required in one country and simply a positive in another. How does this translate into the practice of communications ethics? This question alone begs for more in-depth inquiry.

Early Indication of the Importance of Writing

When asked in the open-ended section at this point of the survey what behavior(s) one would add to the list, the majority of respondents with something to add replied “superior writing skills” and elaborated on its importance. While we believe that if we had explained the difference between skills and behaviors in the introductory paragraph we may have negated this comment, the fact that several respondents listed “superior writing skills” as critical helps validate our hypothesis number one: writing skills are considered the most important of the communication skills offered within a communications curriculum. Following “superior writing skills,” “business acumen/strategy” and “sustainable solutions” were specified in descending order of importance as needed additions to our behaviors. Again, in our curricular map, most of these attributes are treated as skills, outlined in the next section of this study.

Responses to the question of behaviors yielded two critical findings that apply to our process:

Need to Clarify Terms

Responses to our first curriculum map-related question on behaviors was helpful input on the need to consider how we communicate the totality of our curriculum mapping approach to survey respondents in the future. Not all of our respondents keyed in on the meaning of the term “behaviors” and how a

behavior differs from a skill, which we move toward in the next section of the survey. On the one hand, by not including a description of the overall curriculum map and a definition of key terms, we were able to gain additional insights in the open-ended sections that we may not have gained otherwise. Alternatively, some of our respondents may have benefited from descriptors given the different interpretations of words and concepts in different cultures and possible language gaps.

Need to Understand and Develop a Hierarchy of Behaviors

When developing and listing the behaviors on our curriculum map, there was little thought given to the hierarchy of behaviors presented. We did not spend time hypothesizing which of the four might be considered most important, nor did we develop any weighting to translate to the curriculum. The feedback provided through this study indicates that this will be an important category to address in the future. It's clear that, to the professionals and academics who responded, there is a hierarchy in their view based on the weighting they provided the various behaviors. And so we believe that considerations of weight, focus and timing of the placement of the four behaviors in the curriculum merit consideration.

Skills

Moving beyond behaviors to skills, we collected data on 20 skills, each of which line up with one of the four behaviors. Again we asked respondents to rank each of the skills in one of five categories, ranging from vital/required at the high end, to unnecessary on the low end, with an opportunity for neutral.

Importance of Writing as the Number One Communication Skill

As we learned in the prior section on behaviors, in which respondents commented in the open-ended section on the importance of superior writing skills to career-readiness, writing again is validated as the most critical communication skill. Writing, framed as to “craft technically and grammatically correct written materials”, was the most highly rated skill of the 20 listed with a ranking of vital/required by 81% of total respondents, and notably, 100% of respondents from the U.S. This is the only skill to receive a 100% rating as vital/required by any category of respondents. This is the second validation within this study of hypothesis number one: writing skills are the most highly valued of the communication skills taught within the framework of communications studies.

Perspective on Technology

Social media, digital, web-based and/or technology overall appear two places in our map: first, in order to behave as an “insight seeker”, we list “identify and define major technologies (digital, social, web-based, etc.)” as a skill that demonstrates this behavior; second, to behave as a “content creator/story teller” we list “apply appropriate technologies to campaigns/projects” as a relevant skill. Surprisingly these skills received rather average ratings as 50% and 42% respectively ranked them as “vital/required” skills. One reason the second skill (“apply appropriate technologies...”) is rated so low overall (42%) is that 11% of respondents from China ranked it as vital/required, while 58% of U.S. respondents ranked it as vital/required. Here we have a dual finding: first, the overall low ranking of technologies is a surprise given its current value in the global economy; second, there is an apparent disconnect between China-based and U.S.-based professionals and academics on the importance of a foundation in technology to the career-readiness of the undergraduate.

Disparities Between Academics and Professionals in China vs. the U.S.

While the disparity in attitudes toward technology was discussed in the prior point, it's one of several differences between professionals and academics in China versus those based in the U.S. Another is in the area of critical thinking skills. While 97% of U.S. professionals and academics find “employ critical thinking skills” to be vital/required, 56% of professionals and academics in China agree. Another difference is in the area of writing. As already pointed out, a full 100% of U.S.-based academics and professionals find the skill of “craft technically and grammatically correct written materials” to be

vital/required, while 67% of China-based communicators agree it's vital. In fact, 11% of respondents from China are neutral on the importance of writing.

Least Vital/Required Skills

Only one respondent found visual communication skills to be vital/required (4%), although a full 84% of respondents said that visual communications skills are “positive but not required”. The ability to “articulate the effect of one’s work on oneself and the greater community” was second lowest ranked in terms of a vital/required skill (12%) while “identifying and defining historical perspectives in communications” was third lowest (19%). In fact, of all 20 skills listed, having an understanding of historical perspectives was the skill with the highest percentage of respondents choosing “leaning toward unnecessary” (11%) or “unnecessary” (4%), perhaps pointing out that, in an age of technological innovation, an ability to look forward is considered more valuable than the ability to look back.

Ethics is Lowest-Rated Skill

The only other skills to receive the lower-end ratings of “leaning toward unnecessary” or “unnecessary” were: “create thematically consistent and unique content for a multitude of platforms;” “solve problems in a manner that demonstrates deep understanding of ethical implications;” and “articulate the impact of one’s work on oneself and the greater community.” Two of these three low-ranking skills are related to ethics. Notably, zero percent of China-based respondents believe that “solve problems in a manner that demonstrates deep understanding of ethical implications” was vital/required, although 75% found it a positive but not a required behavior. The teaching of ethics receives overall low rankings from all respondent categories including academics, confirming our hypothesis on the low value professionals and academics place on the teaching of ethics.

Topics

Moving beyond skills to topics addressed in the classroom, we collected data on 15 topics, which were listed and not aligned with a particular skill or behavior. Again we asked respondents to rank each of the topics in one of five categories, ranging from vital/required at the high end, to unnecessary on the low end, with an opportunity for neutral.

**TABLE 8
PERSPECTIVES ON TOPICS**

Topics	Respondent Category	Vital/Required	A positive but not a required behavior	Neutral (not positive nor unnecessary)	Leaning Toward Unnecessary	Unnecessary
Social/cultural knowledge	China	56%	44%	0%	0%	0%
	U.S.	45%	54%	0%	0%	0%
	Academics	62%	38%	0%	0%	0%
	Total Respondents	52%	48%	0%	0%	0%
Legal environment	China	33%	33%	23%	11%	0%
	U.S.	25%	42%	33%	0%	0%
	Academics	31%	46%	23%	0%	0%
	Total Respondents	31%	42%	23%	4%	0%
Economic environment	China	22%	53%	22%	0%	0%
	U.S.	50%	42%	8%	0%	0%
	Academics	39%	54%	7%	0%	0%

	Total Respondents	42%	46%	12%	0%	0%
Financial environment	China	11%	56%	22%	11%	0%
	U.S.	42%	42%	16%	0%	0%
	Academics	31%	62%	7%	0%	0%
	Total Respondents	31%	50%	15%	4%	0%
Political environment	China	22%	45%	22%	11%	0%
	U.S.	25%	58%	17%	0%	0%
	Academics	15%	62%	23%	0%	0%
	Total Respondents	27%	54%	15%	4%	0%
Technological Environment	China	34%	44%	11%	11%	0%
	U.S.	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%
	Academics	7%	85%	8%	0%	0%
	Total Respondents	20%	72%	4%	4%	0%
Arts & Entertainment Environment	China	22%	56%	22%	0%	0%
	U.S.	0%	27%	46%	27%	0%
	Academics	15%	38%	32%	15%	0%
	Total Respondents	16%	32%	40%	12%	0%
Trade Agreements	China	11%	33%	45%	11%	0%
	U.S.	0%	25%	33%	42%	0%
	Academics	8%	23%	46%	23%	0%
	Total Respondents	8%	31%	31%	30%	0%
International Alliances	China	11%	56%	22%	11%	0%
	U.S.	8%	24%	33%	34%	0%
	Academics	15%	32%	38%	15%	0%
	Total Respondents	15%	35%	23%	27%	0%
Communications Research	China	11%	78%	11%	0%	0%
	U.S.	42%	42%	16%	0%	0%
	Academics	32%	53%	15%	0%	0%
	Total Respondents	35%	50%	15%	0%	0%
Communications Ethics	China	33%	44%	23%	0%	0%
	U.S.	67%	25%	8%	0%	0%
	Academics	62%	23%	15%	0%	0%
	Total Respondents	54%	31%	15%	0%	0%
Advertising Best Practices	China	33%	33%	34%	0%	0%
	U.S.	8%	33%	42%	17%	0%
	Academics	15%	39%	39%	7%	0%
	Total Respondents	24%	32%	32%	12%	0%
Social Media Environment	China	44%	44%	12%	0%	0%
	U.S.	67%	25%	8%	0%	0%

	Academics	62%	23%	15%	0%	0%
	Total Respondents	58%	34%	8%	0%	0%
Consumer Behavior	China	67%	33%	0%	0%	0%
	U.S.	58%	42%	0%	0%	0%
	Academics	77%	23%	0%	0%	0%
	Total Respondents	65%	31%	4%	0%	0%
Marketing Research	China	56%	44%	0%	0%	0%
	U.S.	42%	58%	0%	0%	0%
	Academics	62%	38%	0%	0%	0%
	Total Respondents	50%	46%	4%	0%	0%

Following is a summary of our findings:

Lack of Alignment on Teaching Topics

Whether we did not list topics that respondents believed are valuable or there is overall ambivalence in this area, this section uncovered the least agreement among professionals and academics within the countries and categories surveyed. In the area of disagreement between countries, 34% of China-based respondents find the topic of technological environment vital/required while 0% of U.S.-based respondents and 7% of academics agree. At the same time, there is a disparity in belief on the value of business education as 42% of U.S.-based respondents believe instruction on financial environment is vital/required versus only 11% of China-based respondents. Even within the countries there is a clear lack of agreement. For example, concerning attitudes within China toward the topic of political environment, 22% agree it's vital/required; 45% agree it's a positive but not required; 22% are neutral; and 11% are leaning toward unnecessary. As a second example, concerning attitudes within the U.S. toward the topic of international alliances, 8% agree it's vital/required; 24% agree it's positive but not required; 33% are neutral; and 34% are leaning toward unnecessary.

Consumer Behavior is Most Valuable Topic

One surprise was the importance of consumer behavior, which was listed as vital/required by more respondents (65%) than social media environment, which came in at a close second (58%). All but one respondent found consumer behavior to be vital/required or a positive, making it overall more highly rated than social media environment as a topic, and the most highly rated topic overall.

Methods of Instruction

Moving beyond topics to methods of instruction, we collected data on 10 methods of instruction, which were listed and not aligned with a particular skill or behavior. Here we asked respondents to rank each of the methods as one of the following: effective always; effective usually; effective at times; leaning toward ineffective; or ineffective.

TABLE 9
PERSPECTIVES ON METHODS OF INSTRUCTION

Methods of Instruction	Respondent Category	Effective Always	Effective Usually	Effective at Times	Leaning Toward Ineffective	Ineffective
Lecture	China	22%	56%	22%	0%	0%
	U.S.	0%	42%	50%	8%	0%
	Academics	8%	54%	30%	8%	0%
	Total Respondents	8%	42%	46%	4%	0%
Case Study	China	63%	25%	12%	0%	0%
	U.S.	8%	50%	42%	0%	0%
	Academics	38%	31%	31%	0%	0%
	Total Respondents	32%	44%	24%	0%	0%
Problem-based Learning	China	33%	67%	0%	0%	0%
	U.S.	67%	33%	0%	0%	0%
	Academics	62%	38%	30%	0%	0%
	Total Respondents	58%	42%	0%	0%	0%
Group Discussion	China	44%	44%	12%	0%	0%
	U.S.	17%	58%	25%	0%	0%
	Academics	31%	52%	15%	0%	0%
	Total Respondents	27%	53%	20%	0%	0%
Group Presentation	China	22%	67%	11%	0%	0%
	U.S.	0%	50%	33%	17%	0%
	Academics	8%	54%	23%	15%	0%
	Total Respondents	8%	57%	23%	12%	0%
Term Paper	China	0%	56%	44%	0%	0%
	U.S.	0%	8%	84%	8%	0%
	Academics	0%	31%	61%	8%	0%
	Total Respondents	4%	26%	58%	12%	0%
Field Trip	China	11%	56%	33%	0%	0%
	U.S.	0%	33%	67%	0%	0%
	Academics	0%	30%	70%	0%	0%
	Total Respondents	8%	42%	46%	4%	0%
Study Abroad Program	China	22%	33%	45%	0%	0%
	U.S.	8%	42%	33%	17%	0%
	Academics	23%	31%	31%	15%	0%
	Total Respondents	19%	35%	35%	11%	0%
Guest Speaker	China	0%	56%	44%	0%	0%
	U.S.	0%	33%	67%	0%	0%
	Academics	0%	54%	46%	15%	0%

	Total Respondents	0%	46%	54%	0%	0%
Workshop	China	11%	67%	22%	0%	0%
	U.S.	8%	50%	42%	0%	0%
	Academics	8%	62%	30%	0%	0%
	Total Respondents	19%	54%	26%	0%	0%

Following is a summary of our findings regarding instruction topics:

Case Study Method of Instruction is Most Valuable to China-Based Respondents

A full 63% of China-based respondents find case study method of instruction to be the most valuable versus 8% of U.S.-based respondents and 38% of academics rated it as effective always.

Problem-Based Learning Most Valuable to U.S.-Based Respondents

The finding in the category of problem-based learning is another illustration in the difference in perspectives between China-based respondents and U.S.-based respondents. While this method received the most enthusiastic reply from the U.S. compared to all other methods, with 67% finding it effective always and 33% finding it effective usually, 67% of China-based respondents find it effective usually and only 33% find it effective always. So while the U.S. is more supportive of this method than all others listed, and the variation in perspectives may be slight as the difference is in the word “always” versus “usually”, the finding reinforces a difference in perspective and the challenges inherent in creating a universal, global curriculum.

Guest Speakers Not Viewed as “Effective Always” by a Single Respondent

Not a single respondent rated guest speakers as an “effective always” method of instruction. The majority of respondents were almost evenly divided between effective usually and effective at times.

Term Paper, Group Presentation and Study Abroad Rated by Some as Leaning Toward Ineffective

While not one respondent identified any of the methods listed as ineffective, three methods were listed by more than 10% of respondents as leaning that way. Those three methods – term paper, group presentation and study abroad – received ratings of 12%, 12% and 11% respectively in the category of “leaning toward ineffective”. This finding again points to the possibility that a definition of terms or examples might be enough to explain their value or, alternatively, could lead to more questions and possibly lower ratings. It is a question to probe in future studies.

Lower Ratings for Methods

In contrast to the other categories in this survey, ratings in methods of instruction were largely across the spectrum. In contrast to the other areas respondents rated, not one method received an over 70% rating in any category. In addition, six of the 10 methods received “leaning toward ineffective” ratings.

Real-World Project Work Found Lacking

In the open-ended section following this question, several respondents suggested adding “real world project work” to the methods of instruction. This important piece of data points to the high-level of interest evaluators of career readiness have in knowing a graduate has experienced real project work outside of the classroom environment. It is great insight into how to improve the list of methods of instruction, opening the door to include internship projects and the “body of work” development identified early in this report as a key focus of the college and the department.

CONCLUSION

At the outset of this study, we stated a three-part hypothesis:

- Writing skills are the most highly valued of the communication skills taught within the framework of communications studies;
- Ethics is the least valuable of the behaviors taught within the communications curriculum according to professionals and academics; and
- There is little agreement among professionals and academics worldwide on the educational requirements (e.g., behaviors, teaching topics, materials, etc.) for career success.

Our first hypothesis concerning writing skills was validated as writing, framed as to “craft technically and grammatically correct written materials”, was the most highly rated skill of the 20 listed with a ranking of vital/required by 81% of all respondents, and notably, 100% of respondents from the U.S. This is the only skill to receive a 100% rating as vital/required by any category of respondents.

Our second hypothesis concerning ethics also was validated as two of the lowest-ranking skills were ethics-related: “solve problems in a manner that demonstrates deep understanding of ethical implications;” and “articulate the impact of one’s work on oneself and the greater community.” Notably, zero percent of China-based respondents believe that “solve problems in a manner that demonstrates deep understanding of ethical implications” was vital/required, although 75% found it a positive but not a required behavior. The teaching of ethics receives overall low rankings from all respondent categories including academics.

Our third and final hypothesis was validated only in part as we learned that, contrary to our initial thoughts, there is significant alignment on behaviors among professionals and academics in China, Europe and the U.S. There is however a lack of alignment in the areas of topics and methods of instruction, pointing the need for additional input on our curricular map in those categories.

In the end, who decides the meaning of career readiness? While industry is a vital partner, the responsibility to define “career readiness” rests in the educators’ hands. The educator determines what “career readiness” means, its value and how to drive toward that outcome. While it is important and even vital to partner with industry on the scope and design of curriculum, this must be done with the perspective that not everything in the curriculum will line up with industry needs or expectations. Is it right to eliminate an understanding of the history of communications from the curriculum because it is viewed as less vital to the functioning of a career-ready marketing communication professional than other skills? Should educators forego the teaching of ethical matters because it doesn’t rank as high on the professionals’ most-desired skills as critical thinking? We would argue that the answer is no, and that it is up to the educators to educate both the students and the industry professionals on the value of such a curricular emphasis. It is possible that, as is often the case in business, the realities of the day-to-day, short-term profit motives distract from the long-term vision. Doing what is right is often overshadowed by the need to do what is needed right now. It is up to the educator to strike the balance, and to help the student learn what is needed now *and* learn the value of what is right, so they can add perspective and rational thought to the global marketplace of ideas and, ultimately, shape the global economy with a mind to balance of short-term needs and long-term societal aspirations.

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